

Music History and Cosmopolitanism / abstract & bio

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Session 3a / Thursday June 2, 9–11 am

The concept of ‘cosmopolitanism’ in Soviet writing on music

Given the professed internationalism of communism as a political movement and its aspiration to create a transnational Lebenswelt, it is a striking paradox that the epithet ‘cosmopolitan’ quickly acquired a deeply pejorative connotation in Soviet cultural discourse. By the end of the Stalinist period, ‘cosmopolitanism’ had been ‘unmasked’ (*razoblachyon*) by Soviet ideologues as a manifestation of a decadent bourgeois worldview, which, in spite of its seemingly innocuous and utopian character, in reality reflected the rapacious striving of capital to create optimal conditions for the maximisation of profit. During the purges of cultural and intellectual life conducted by Andrey Zhdanov in 1946–48, the word became a catch-all term of vague abuse for any supposedly baneful influences emanating from the West, and especially from America and Great Britain. This paper will sketch its curious lexical history in the Soviet context, showing that its semantic connotations were conditioned by inherited convictions of Western cultural decline and Russian exceptionalism stretching back at least as far as the nineteenth century. I will draw on a range of writings by notable critics and musicologists, including Boris Asaf'yev, Yuriy Keldish, and Tamara Livanova to trace the evolution of the concept and to show how it not only acquired stridently xenophobic overtones, but was also in large part responsible for a marked degradation of Soviet musicology under ideological pressures as scholars felt increasingly compelled to construct tendentious and even mendacious historical narratives that downplayed foreign cultural achievements and make exaggerated claims for the supremacy of Russian and Soviet music, lest they be found guilty of *nizkopolonstvo pered Zapadom* or ‘toadying to the West’.

Patrick Zuk lectures in the Music Department at the University of Durham in England. He is a specialist on Russian/Soviet music of the earlier twentieth century, and is currently engaged in writing a biographical-critical study of Nikolay Myaskovsky, on whose work he has published articles in *Music and Letters* and *The Journal of Musicology*. He is also co-editing (with Marina Frolova-Walker) a volume of essays *Russian Music Since 1917*, which will be published next year by Oxford University Press in conjunction with the British Academy.